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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 10th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. SENGWE (Zimbabwe)

later: Mr. STEIN (Germany)
(Vice-Chairman)

later: Mr. SENGWE (Zimbabwe)
(Chairman)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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ORGANIZATION OF WORK

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 118: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued) (A/51/32, A/51/125, A/51/253, A/51/268 and A/51/337)

1. Mr. SMYTH (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union as well as the associate countries of Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, said that the international and multilingual character of the United Nations was underpinned by high quality conference services. The central role those services played in the activities of the Organization underlined the need to employ them as efficiently and effectively as possible, particularly at a time of financial restraint.

2. While the European Union was ready to support adoption of the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 1997, it noted with concern that it was yet more extensive, and that its adoption might require additional resources, an issue that should be addressed in accordance with normal budgetary procedures. In particular, where a waiver of the headquarters rule was sought, consideration should be given to the cost-effectiveness of the request and the level of utilization of conference servicing resources at the established headquarters.

3. General Assembly activities at the resumed spring session should be more efficiently planned. The guidance given to the Committee on Conferences should take account of the work of the open-ended high-level working groups of the General Assembly, which, owing to the mechanical application of conference planning rules currently had no priority.

4. He noted with concern the fall in the overall and average utilization factors, both of which now lay below the 80 per cent benchmark. In fact, none of the Main Committees had reached the benchmark figure during the first part of the fiftieth session. The European Union welcomed the invitation by the Committee on Conferences to the chairmen of the subsidiary bodies involved to redress that situation, and endorsed the recommendations of that Committee in paragraphs 46, 47 and 49 of its report (A/51/32).

5. The Committee on Conferences must exert its influence more forcefully: if only intergovernmental bodies decided when and how often they were to meet its coordinating role would be diluted.

6. The estimate that $875,000 in conference resources went unutilized if every meeting held in New York was delayed by 10 minutes offered a salutary lesson, and added relevance to the request by the President of the General Assembly for delegates to start meetings promptly.

7. A comprehensive and accurate cost-accounting system for conference services would provide the Office of Conference and Support Services with a fundamental management tool. Such a system would allow for losses associated with underutilization to be accurately allocated and properly addressed, and would permit the comparative costing of translation services. A good accounting system would promote the better application of resources and an improvement in

the quality of conference services outputs. The Secretariat should continue to develop the system on a priority basis.

8. The report on the control and limitation of documentation (A/51/268) made a helpful contribution; the information it provided should continue to be submitted. Existing page limits in respect of all documents originating in the Secretariat should be enforced, while those limits should be monitored with a view to reducing documentation without affecting quality. The fundamental issue was not, in fact, to control costs, but to enhance the work of delegations and of the Secretariat.

9. The European Union hoped that the Joint Inspection Unit survey of the role of publications in implementing mandates of intergovernmental bodies and of how to make recurrent publication more cost-effective would soon be finalized.

10. He noted the efforts of the Director of Conference Services to draw the attention of intergovernmental bodies to paragraphs 6, 7 and 8 of General Assembly resolution 50/206 C, and welcomed the decisions of the Committee on Natural Resources and the Committee on Relations with the Host Country to streamline their documentation. In addition, the decision of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space to replace verbatim records with unedited transcripts deserved wide support. He welcomed the view of the secretariat of that Committee to the effect that, considering the savings, it saw no reason to revert to verbatim records. The European Union wished to draw attention to the need for timely submission of documentation, since delays led to a wastage of conference-servicing resources.

11. He welcomed the improved format of documentation and economies in production costs as a result of modern technology. For example, estimated savings of more than $1 million per biennium had been generated by the introduction of internal typesetting.

12. Modern technology would also improve access to information. The optical disk system had allowed print runs to be reduced, although, during what was a transitional period, the system should not be seen as an alternative to traditional documents. Access to the system through the Internet should help to reduce delegations' demands for hard-copy documentation. Dissemination of United Nations documents via the Internet should respect the rules relating to official languages. In that regard he welcomed the United Nations Development Programme initiative to connect permanent missions to the Internet.

13. The European Union was strongly opposed to the audio recording of informal consultations, which should be undertaken only in the most exceptional circumstances, at the request of the intergovernmental body concerned.

14. The European Union, noting the reaffirmation by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/11 of the importance of multilingualism, endorsed the commendation by the Committee on Conferences of the translation services for their efforts to improve the quality of translation in all official languages.

15. Mr. Stein (Germany), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

16. Mr. GODA (Japan) said that, because they were used so extensively, the efficient and effective utilization of conference and documentation services was important. In that connection he welcomed the efforts made by the Secretariat. At the same time much could be done by Member States, which, for example, determined whether meetings started and ended on time. In that regard he welcomed the stance taken by the President of the General Assembly.

17. The calendar of conferences should ensure optimum use of resources, and waivers of the headquarters rule should be subject to careful review. He endorsed the relevant recommendations of the Committee on Conferences (A/51/32, paras. 24 and 22).

18. He regretted the fall in the overall and average utilization factors. In 1995 both figures had been below the 80 per cent benchmark. That only 54 per cent of bodies had 1995 utilization factors exceeding the benchmark was also disappointing. He welcomed the efforts of the Committee on Conferences to improve the utilization of conference services. However, since ending a meeting early was not the same as starting late, in that it could reflect the efficiency of the organ concerned, the analysis of meeting statistics should seek to provide a more accurate picture of utilization. The proposed information memorandum (A/51/32, para. 50) seemed to be a step in the right direction.

19. He endorsed improved coordination in the use of conference services at Headquarters, Geneva and Vienna, and regretted the failure to submit a proposal for a comprehensive cost-accounting system.

20. The Secretariat should continue its efforts to produce more concise and reader-friendly reports, while intergovernmental bodies should review their need for documentation. In that regard he endorsed the recommendations contained in paragraphs 87, 90, 91 and 93 of the report of the Committee on Conferences.

21. The use of unedited transcripts by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space caused deep concern to his delegation; the utility and cost of the exercise should be carefully reviewed. His delegation endorsed the recommendation regarding audio recordings of informal consultations (A/51/32, para. 125).

22. Mrs. SEALY MONTEITH (Jamaica) said that the efficiency measures proposed by the Secretary-General were expected to seriously affect the servicing of meetings and documentation processing. It was ironic that technological innovations that could lead to productivity gains ran the risk of being deferred, thereby negating the savings being sought.

23. She welcomed the progress made with the optical disk system. The training provided to permanent missions by the Secretariat had been most useful. However, some countries lacked the basic capacity to benefit from those developments, and she trusted that the Secretary-General's proposals on facilitating access by developing countries to the optical disk system would take that fact into account. She agreed that new technologies should not constitute an alternative to traditional documentation during the transition to electronic documentation.

24. She commended the efforts by the Secretariat to improve the quality and presentation of documentation and reduce costs and urged that they be continued.

25. Requests for interpretation services for meetings of regional and other groups were often denied since they were serviced on an "as available" basis. Yet such meetings were an integral part of intergovernmental discussion, and often facilitated the efficient conduct of meetings. Moreover, the frequency of group meetings would increase given the growing complexity of the Organization's work, placing a greater burden on limited resources. She was thus concerned that more adequate provision could not be made. In that regard she endorsed the recommendation on how intergovernmental bodies could take into account meetings of regional and other major groupings (A/51/32, para. 58).

26. She commended the sterling contribution made by the members of the Secretariat, especially during the difficult periods of financial distress faced by the Organization. At a time when insecurity and general uncertainty about conditions of service had dampened morale, delegations needed more than ever to be sensitive to the situation. Her delegation strongly reaffirmed its confidence in the staff of the Secretariat.

27. Mr. Sengwe (Zimbabwe) resumed the Chair.

28. Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development) said that the expert group meeting on violence against women migrant workers held in Manila in May 1996 had been mandated by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/168, which had requested the Secretary-General to convene a meeting of an expert group, with the participation of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on Violence against Women and under the regular programme of the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Secretariat. The meeting was to make recommendations on the matter for submission, through normal channels, to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session.

29. The report of the meeting, the purpose of which was to provide recommendations for consideration by the Secretary-General, who could then make them available to intergovernmental bodies, had been taken into account by the Secretary-General in his report to the General Assembly on the subject (A/51/325).

30. The meeting had been guided by the mandate of the Economic and Social Council as set out in its resolution 1987/24 and its members were experts selected by the Secretary-General on the basis of their ability to provide information and ideas that might lead to recommendations as to the most effective measures for dealing with the issue. One of the experts was from Singapore.

31. He emphasized that such ad hoc expert group meetings were purely advisory in nature and had no decision-making power. The procedures of the meeting in question had been based on the rules and practices of the Commission on the Status of Women. Accordingly, it had elected its own officers and had been responsible for its own report, which it adopted before adjourning.

32. Those well-established practices had been made clear to the participants in the Manila meeting and had been followed. As at other similar meetings where procedural difficulties had been encountered, an effort had been made at the Manilla meeting, to find a solution that would satisfy all of the participants, primarily to accommodate the concerns of the observers from Singapore.

33. While the full report had been adopted by the meeting and final changes cleared with the Rapporteur, further adjustments had later been made to reflect the reservations of one of the participants and had been included in the text presented to the Economic and Social Council, with which the delegation of Singapore had expressed satisfaction.

34. The inadvertent reproduction of the earlier version of the report as an advance unedited text of the report to the General Assembly had occurred because the final text of the annex had not been included in the electronic document containing the unedited text of the Secretary-General's report. The nature of the error had been detected within an hour of its having been brought to the attention of the Division. Corrective measures had been taken immediately and a formal apology made to the Permanent Mission of Singapore.

35. The issues raised by the delegation of Singapore in its statement to the Fifth Committee had already been brought to the attention of programme managers in the Secretariat shortly after the expert group had concluded its work at the end of May 1996. The matter had been discussed, misunderstandings clarified and the text of the report modified, apparently to the satisfaction of the delegations concerned.

36. The Secretariat regretted the technical error that had occurred and had taken steps to ensure that the circumstances which had led to that unfortunate situation did not recur.

37. The Secretariat could not, however, accept the attacks on the integrity and impartiality of the international civil service made by the delegation of Singapore in its statement. While the Secretariat was not immune to error, that did not give grounds for questioning its commitment to serving Governments impartially. Nor could it justify highly charged and personal accusations against individual staff members. The Secretariat strongly objected to such tactics, which undermined the propriety and dignity of the deliberative processes of the United Nations.

38. Mr. HALLIDAY (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) said that procedures were available whereby a delegation, if it so wished, could raise matters concerning a staff member's performance or conduct. Article 97 of the Charter of the United Nations provided that the Secretary-General was the chief administrative officer of the Organization. Consequently, the staff were accountable solely to him and, if a delegation was dissatisfied with either the conduct or the performance of a staff member, a complaint could properly be made to the head of the staff member's department or to the Secretary-General himself. Once a complaint had been made, established investigation procedures would be followed. They ensured, in particular, that the accused staff member was afforded the benefit of due process, in particular by being given the opportunity to respond to the charges and having his or her response impartially

and fairly addressed by the Secretary-General. That fundamental right to due process would be lost if public accusations were made against a named staff member in a Main Committee of the General Assembly where the staff member had neither the right nor the opportunity to defend himself or herself.

39. The representative of Singapore in his statement to the Fifth Committee had indicated that, unless action were taken, his delegation would find it difficult to support the recommendation of the International Civil Service Commission for an increase in the remuneration of the staff. However, the question of a salary increase was not relevant to the assessment of a complaint or charge against a named staff member, which was the duty and responsibility of the Secretary-General alone.

40. In conclusion, he said that individual members of the Secretariat were not immune from making mistakes and that, if mistakes were made, the procedures to deal with the situation were applied by the Secretary-General under the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules. He hoped that, with that explanation, the issue could now be regarded as closed.

41. Mr. HO Tung Yen (Singapore) expressed appreciation to the Secretariat for its explanations in response to his statement to the Committee at an earlier meeting. The Secretariat had further convinced his delegation that there had been improprieties in the conduct of the meeting on violence against women. His delegation felt that it would be in the interest of Member States to be informed of the misconduct of staff members, especially where, as in the present case, a mandate provided by General Assembly resolutions had not been adhered to.

42. His delegation had drawn attention to the issue not because of the substance of the report - in which the mistakes had been corrected - but because it felt that it was unacceptable that the Secretariat should systematically try to suppress a point of view with which it did not agree. The staff member involved had been named because the mistakes had been committed by only one member of the Secretariat. Just as thanks and commendation were given, where appropriate, to individual named members of the Secretariat, his delegation felt that it was right to be equally frank were criticism of staff members was called for.

43. Complaints had previously been made about the same staff member both to the Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and to the Division for the Advancement of Women. However, after several repetitions of similar mistakes his delegation had concluded that the Division for the Advancement of Women was acting independently and was disregarding the views of Member States. Contrary to what had been suggested by the Secretariat, his delegation had drawn attention not to an isolated mistake but to a clear pattern of mistakes, half-truths and untruths. Such errors could be avoided in the future if the Secretariat were as competent and neutral as it was expected to be.

44. The Permanent Representative of his country reserved his right to revert to the matter at a later stage.

AGENDA ITEM 120: HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (continued) (A/51/304, A/51/421 and A/51/475; A/C.5/49/63 and A/C.5/49/64; A/C.4/50/64; A/C.5/51/1, A/C.5/51/2, A/C.5/51/3, A/C.5/51/6 and A/C.5/51/7)

45. Mr. SMYTH (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, said that the European Union recognized that the staff of the United Nations were an important asset of the Organization. Over recent years they had been working through a period of financial constraint. The European Union attached importance to the role of the Secretariat and to a staff that was independent, competent and dedicated to its work and the ideals of the United Nations. Staff rules and regulations should be strictly adhered to. The quality of the career civil service was crucial to the Organization's success. Some 70 per cent of the financial resources of the Organization related to the cost of its human resources, which must always be soundly and efficiently managed.

46. Accordingly he welcomed the report on the implementation of the Secretary-General's strategy for the management of the Organization's human resources (A/C.5/51/1), though more details of the difficulties encountered would have been useful. While progress had been made in implementation of the strategy, much remained to be done.

47. The European Union supported the implementation of a credible Performance Appraisal System (PAS), since coherent and transparent performance evaluation and management were crucial in establishing a positive working environment and a more effective Organization. A successful PAS should contribute to enhanced accountability for all. He requested information on the cause of delays in implementation of PAS. The Secretariat should inform Member States of the findings of the review it intended to conduct once the first performance cycle had been completed.

48. Given the importance of ensuring that those responsible for improving the management culture were equipped for the task, the People Management Training Programme appeared to be a useful tool. Consideration should also be given to disseminating the assessment of the impact of the training beyond participants once a significant number of staff has completed the follow-up programme.

49. Staff development and career support were prerequisites for the long-term consolidation of a motivated and flexible workforce. Managed staff assignments, entailing cross-disciplinary opportunities within and between duty stations, offered access to a high level of mobility, which was critical to the successful working of the Organization. Planned rotation of personnel between different departments and duty stations would be useful and would reduce the likelihood for staff of overlong stays in the same position and duty station. Mobility, in addition to efficiency, competence and integrity, should be taken into account in career planning and promotions.

50. Stronger human resources planning and recruitment could help the Organization to address its personnel problems. The States members of the European Union would assist in the search for qualified candidates.

51. Decentralization and delegation of authority helped to foster greater responsibility and effectiveness. Delegation of authority must be supported by consistency of approach and commitment to global organizational goals. A reasonable balance must be struck between decentralization and central monitoring and control of human resources by the Office of Human Resources Management, a factor of particular relevance to recruitment, promotion and mobility, which should be undertaken with the needs of the entire Organization, not simply those of a single duty station or office, in mind.

52. The European Union urged the Secretary-General to try to achieve staff reductions through attrition and agreed termination, providing, if necessary, additional early separation programmes. More possibilities for leave without pay should be offered.

53. The desirable ranges formula provided an indicator of staff recruitment on as wide a geographical basis as possible. In that regard he noted from the Secretary-General's report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/51/421) that the number of unrepresented and under-represented States had declined, but regretted that one member of the European Union and some of the States aligning themselves with his statement appeared on the list of under-represented countries, while others fell below the mid-point of the range.

54. The independence of the Secretariat could best be served by recruiting on as wide a geographical basis as possible. National competitive examinations served an important function in that regard. Accordingly he would welcome clarification as to why six candidates had been recruited outside that process.

55. The European Union was disappointed to note that, as stated in the report of the Secretary-General on improving the status of women in the Secretariat (A/51/304), the long-term goal of complete parity between men and women in the Secretariat by the year 2000 as well as the target of 25 per cent participation by women at the D-1 level and above by 1995 had not been reached. The European Union believed that the United Nations should continue to accord priority to the recruitment and promotion of women, particularly at the senior political and decision-making levels. In that connection, it welcomed the efforts being made by the Secretary-General to implement the measures adopted in the Secretary-General's strategic plan of action to improve the status of women in the Secretariat. The reports of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/49/176 and A/50/509) which were related to the advancement of women should continue to be seen as important reference points in pursuit of that goal.

56. The report of the Secretary-General on the employment of retirees (A/C.5/51/2) was comprehensive and persuasive, and the related report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/51/475) offered some simplified and acceptable solutions to the difficulties faced in that connection, especially with respect to the income ceiling of retirees which had been established by the General Assembly in 1982. The European Union believed that the ACABQ report deserved support.

57. Referring to the reports of the Secretary-General on the costs of staff representation activities during the years 1990-1994 (A/C.5/49/63 and A/C.5/49/64), on reasonable time for staff representational activities

(A/C.5/50/64) and on the costs and modalities of staff representational activities (A/C.5/51/6), he said that the European Union was keenly aware of the value of positive staff-management relations and of the common interest of both management and staff in the development of good human resources management policies. It would be interesting to have information on the committees, subcommittees and working groups which supported the work of staff management representation, on the costs related to released staff and on the proportion of staff who were members of the staff representational bodies.

58. It was a matter of regret to the European Union that, in spite of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/233, a number of JIU reports which ought to have been considered under agenda item 120 had not been transmitted in time for the consideration of the Member States. Any related decisions by the Fifth Committee should be taken only after those reports had been introduced and discussed.

59. Turning to the report of the Secretary-General on privileges and immunities of officials of the United Nations and the specialized agencies and related organizations (A/C.5/51/3) he said that the important, sensitive and sometimes difficult task of maintaining the personal safety and security of the staff of the United Nations system was fully recognized by the European Union which appreciated that many of the operations in which staff were expected to serve were complicated and dangerous. Disregard for the privileges and immunities of the officials and associated personnel, as set forth in Article 105 of the Charter and in the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations and the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Specialized Agencies, constituted a major obstacle to the implementation of the missions and programmes assigned by the Member States to the United Nations system and was also a violation of the rules of international law. Every Government had an obligation to maintain order and protect persons within their jurisdiction, and had a special responsibility with respect to officials of the United Nations system. Quite apart from the very serious cases of arbitrary detention, arrest and abduction of United Nations officials mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, the death of 10 civilian staff members since 1 July 1995 was totally unacceptable. Those violations of the principles established by the Charter and by international conventions should be of the deepest concern to all Member States.

60. The European Union regretted that, once again, the name of Alec Collett, kidnapped in Lebanon in March 1985, was included in the list in annex I of the report of the Secretary-General of persons detained or disappeared. The European Union strongly condemned all acts of terrorism and again appealed to those responsible for the detention of Mr. Collett to provide information as to his fate, and demanded his immediate release. The other cases listed in annex I were equally important and were also of great concern to the European Union, which called upon the Governments involved to make every effort to ensure respect in their countries for the privileges and immunities of civilian staff members so that they could exercise their functions without fear or constraints. The same protection should also apply to personnel engaged in United Nations peacekeeping operations and humanitarian missions.

61. In conclusion, he reaffirmed the European Union's unconditional support for the efforts undertaken by the Secretary-General to guarantee the safety and protection of personnel working for the United Nations and the specialized agencies and related organizations. It would also welcome clarification of the remarks by the United Nations Security Coordinator on the question of resources for staff security which had been presented somewhat differently in the United Nations press release. The member States of the European Union would never propose any reduction of resources earmarked for the safety and security of United Nations personnel.

62. Mrs. ARCHINI (Italy) said that table 10 in document A/51/421 showed that her country was under-represented in terms of staff in posts subject to geographical distribution and expressed the willingness of her delegation to cooperate with the Secretariat in any appropriate way with a view to the holding of an examination for the recruitment of staff at the P-2 and P-3 levels in order to redress the situation. Should it not be considered practicable to hold an examination, she asked whether it would be possible to recruit suitable candidates who had been successful in the examination held in 1993. She pointed out that an added advantage of such an arrangement would be the likely cost saving to the Organization.

AGENDA ITEM 114: PROGRAMME PLANNING (A/51/6 (Perspective and Note), A/51/6 (fascicles) and A/51/16 (Parts I and II))

Proposed medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001

63. Mr. TAKASU (Controller) said that the medium-term plan of the United Nations was the principal directive of the Organization which gave overall direction for its work and served as a framework for the preparation of the biennial programme budgets. The medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 thus formed the basic framework for the budgets for 1998-1999 and for 2000-2001.

64. In recent years, Member States had recognized a number of shortcomings in the current medium-term plan. In particular, they considered that the objectives to be accomplished within the plan period were not sufficiently precise, that the links between the plan and the programme budget were formalistic, that responsibility and accountability for the implementation of programmes were not clear and that there was some duplication between the two texts.

65. Despite those shortcomings, the Member States had agreed that the medium-term plan should be prepared as part of the process of elaborating and adopting policies, and as a framework for organizing and presenting activities and output included in the budget. The plan had been considered necessary in order to preserve and enhance the universal character of the Organization as well as the cohesiveness and effectiveness of the Secretariat.

66. At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly had noted that the then current format of the medium-term plan had a limited impact on the work of the Organization. It had therefore invited the Secretary-General to prepare a prototype for the new medium-term plan. Such a prototype had been submitted by the Secretary-General for review by the Committee for Programme and Coordination

(CPC) in 1994. In its decision 50/452 of December 1995, the General Assembly had authorized the Secretary-General to begin the preparation of the medium-term plan on the basis of that prototype, taking into account the recommendations of CPC, the views of ACABQ and those of the Member States as expressed in the Fifth Committee.

67. The format of the new medium-term plan had thus been developed through joint cooperative efforts involving both the Member States and the Secretariat. The new structure of the plan currently before the Committee formed an important part of the Secretary-General's commitment to enhancing responsibility and accountability for the work of the Organization.

68. The plan comprised two parts. Part I - unlike the first part of the current medium-term plan where the introduction mainly summarized the programmes, identified the challenges and problems to be addressed - provided broad directions for action in line with legislative intent and reflected the orientations and expectations of the Member States. It consisted of an analysis of persistent problems that continued to need attention and set out the challenges that the international community would need to face and directions on priorities to be pursued. The first part of the plan therefore provided the basis for deliberation by Member States at a policy level that was intended to result in clear guidance for the Secretariat on the overall directions of work to be undertaken.

69. The Secretary-General had initially submitted document A/51/6 (Perspective) as the first part of the plan for consideration by Member States. However, CPC had been unable to reach agreement on the content of that document at its session in June 1996 and had recommended that the Secretary-General be asked to present to the current session of the General Assembly, through CPC at its September session, a short and concise document to be considered for inclusion in the proposed medium-term plan based on relevant resolutions and decisions of intergovernmental bodies and taking into account the views expressed by the members of CPC.

70. In response to the request of CPC, the Secretary-General had prepared a note (A/51/6 (Note)) for inclusion in the medium-term plan. At its September session, CPC had taken note of that document and had recommended that the General Assembly should pay due attention to the observations expressed thereon by members of CPC.

71. In preparing the proposed medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, the Secretary-General had taken account of the guidelines provided by CPC, the need for a balanced picture of persistent problems and emerging trends, issues which had been identified by Member States as crucial to the Organization, and the Organization's role in tackling the problems of economic and social development.

72. The first part of the plan would present a consensus view of the opportunities and challenges before the United Nations. The Organization would continue to be a platform for dialogue and for the articulation of shared views and common understandings. The Secretary-General believed that priority should be given to such areas as the maintenance of international peace and security; the promotion of sustained economic growth and sustainable development in the

developing world; the promotion of development in Africa; the protection of human rights; more effective responses to humanitarian emergencies; and the promotion of justice and international law.

73. The second part of the medium-term plan comprised the programme framework for all programmes under the responsibility of United Nations offices. The proposed programmes were more sharply focused and more result-oriented with greater emphasis on the objectives to be achieved within the four-year period rather than on output and activities. In order to ensure accountability, responsibility for achieving the objectives set for each programme would be clearly assigned. Programmes now corresponded to the new organizational structure of the Secretariat, with the subprogrammes corresponding to organizational units at the division level.

74. The medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 was the Organization's response to the persistent problems and challenges faced by Member States and their peoples. In order for the United Nations to continue effectively to discharge its mandate into the twenty-first century, however, it was necessary to maintain and further strengthen an independent and international civil service of the highest calibre. Equally essential was the need for continuous, predictable and assured political and financial support from Member States. Such support was critical if the Organization was to fulfil the objectives set out in the proposed medium-term plan.

75. Mr. OSELLA (Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Coordination), introducing the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on its thirty-sixth session, said that the first part of the report (A/51/16 (Part I)) focused on programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1994-1995; the proposed medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 (Perspective); strengthening the role of evaluation findings in programme design, delivery and policy directives; in-depth evaluation of public information; in-depth evaluation of peacekeeping operations: termination phase; and the triennial review of the in-depth evaluation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

76. Under coordination questions, the Committee had considered the report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) and preparations for the Joint Meetings of CPC and ACC; implementation of the System-wide Plan of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development; and the proposed system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001. The Committee also had considered the reports of the Joint Inspection Unit.

77. During the second part of its session (report contained in A/51/16 (Part II)), the Committee had considered the proposed medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 and the outline of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999.

78. With respect to coordination questions, the Committee had stressed the need for documentation to be made available sufficiently in advance to enable the Committee to study it, and for more information to be given on achievement by ACC of its objectives, to permit a better assessment of its effectiveness. In stressing the importance of the continued attention by the Secretary-General to

efforts to assist countries invoking Article 50 of the Charter, the Committee had requested that information should continue to be provided to it on that subject in the future. The Committee had also stressed the need to provide the organizations of the United Nations system with adequate resources to implement their programmes of work as well as the legal obligation of all Member States to fulfil their financial commitments on time and in full.

79. Many delegations had strongly reaffirmed the role of CPC in providing expert advice to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly on programme and coordination issues and, in that context, had strongly reiterated the need to strengthen the role of the Committee. Other delegations had questioned the usefulness of the Committee as it currently operated and had concluded that it needed to review its working procedures with a view to being more effective and efficient.

80. The Committee had taken note of the progress report on the implementation of the revised System-wide Plan of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development and had expressed strong concern about the proliferation of new initiatives for Africa which produced few tangible results. The Committee had therefore urged the organizations of the United Nations system, especially the World Bank, to coordinate their efforts and pool their resources to produce tangible results and had requested a report on the implementation of the System-wide Special Initiative on Africa to be submitted to it at its spring session in 1997.

81. The Committee had considered the report on the proposed system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001, and had made a series of recommendations aimed at ensuring that the item on women became an integral part of every programme developed by the Organization. Its observations on the different sections of the plan were contained in paragraphs 178 to 189 of its report (A/51/16 (Part I)).

82. The Committee had expressed its appreciation for the report of JIU entitled "Accountability, management improvement and oversight in the United Nations system" and had endorsed its recommendations 2 to 6, subject to the reservations expressed in paragraphs 194 to 199 of Part I of its report.

83. Turning to programme questions, the Committee had considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on strengthening the role of evaluation findings in programme design, delivery and policy directives (A/51/88, annex) and had noted that the compressed cycle of the in-depth evaluation had increased evaluation coverage without sacrificing quality. Having considered the report of OIOS on the in-depth evaluation of the Department of Public Information (E/AC.51/1996/2, annex), the Committee had recognized the importance of the Department's activities and had endorsed recommendations 1 to 13, 14 (a), 15, 16, 18 and 19 with the modifications and understandings contained in paragraph 74 of its report (A/51/16 (Part I)).

84. The Committee had considered the report of OIOS on the in-depth evaluation of peacekeeping operations: termination phase (E/AC.51/1996/3, annex) and had agreed with the emphasis in the report on learning from experience. It considered that a systematic approach to building up and maintaining

institutional memory was crucial and would generate savings in the future. It had endorsed recommendations 2, 5, 12, 14 (a) and (b) and 15 (b). Recommendations 1, 3 (a) and (b), 4, 14 (c) and 15 (a) had also been endorsed with the modifications and understandings set out in paragraph 92 of Part I of its report.

85. The Committee had found that the report of OIOS on the triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee at its thirty-second session on the evaluation of UNHCR (E/AC.51/1996/4, annex) provided an informative statement of the progress made by UNHCR in implementing the Committee's recommendations. The Committee had recommended that the triennial review, together with the Committee's discussion and its conclusions and recommendations thereon, should be submitted to the Executive Committee of UNHCR for its consideration and appropriate action.

86. The Committee had considered the report of the Secretary-General on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1994-1995 (A/51/128 and Add.1) and, while welcoming its clarity and format of presentation, had acknowledged the inherent limits of any purely quantitative approach to programme performance and the margin of error implied in such an exercise. The Committee had also expressed its concern at the overall low level of implementation, in particular, the sharp decline in the implementation of high priority designated activities from the level obtaining in the biennium 1992-1993. The Committee had requested the Secretary-General to refine the reporting methodology for the following programme performance report, so as better to reflect both the extent to which the activities of the programme of work had actually been mandated throughout the period concerned and the extent to which they had actually been implemented. The Committee had also recommended that appropriate measures should be taken to ensure that programme managers adhered to the priorities mandated by the General Assembly. The Committee felt, lastly, that a clearer organizational distinction between the application of regular budget resources to fund operational activities and extrabudgetary resources to fund activities of a non-operational nature would provide more transparency in resource utilization and ensure that resources of the regular budget were utilized to address the mandates for which they had been appropriated.

87. With regard to the perspective of the proposed medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, the Committee had reiterated its view that the medium-term plan constituted the principal policy directive of the United Nations and provided the framework for the biennial programme budgets. It was therefore important for the plan to reflect all mandated programmes and activities. The Committee agreed that if the new format of the medium-term plan were adopted, it would be necessary to amend, as appropriate, the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, which governed the preparation of the medium-term plan. The Committee also agreed with the Secretary-General's view that efforts to ensure that the United Nations was equipped to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century depended on, above all, continuous, predictable and assured political and financial support from Member States.

88. The Committee had been unable to reach agreement on the content of document A/51/6 (Perspective) and, consequently, had been unable to consider the document, as submitted, as an integral part of the medium-term plan. It had therefore requested that the Secretary-General be asked to present to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session, a short and concise document to be considered for inclusion in the proposed medium-term plan outlining the broad areas of priority for the proposed period of the medium-term plan.

89. The Committee had been able to make conclusions and recommendations on 21 of the 25 programmes in the proposed medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001. It had made every effort to reach agreement on the remaining programmes (programme 1. Political affairs; programme 9. Trade and development; programme 11. Human settlements; and programme 19. Human rights). In the end, the Committee had taken note of those programmes and had recommended that they be considered by the General Assembly, taking into account the views expressed and amendments proposed by Member States.

90. Finally, the Committee had considered the report of the Secretary-General containing the outline of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 (A/51/289) and had recommended that the General Assembly should give further consideration to all the elements contained therein, taking into account the divergent views of Member States.

91. Mr. ETUKET (Uganda) supported the conclusion of CPC that the medium-term plan was the principal policy directive of the United Nations and provided the framework for the biennial programme budgets. It was therefore essential to ensure that the plan reflected all mandated programmes and activities. It was in that connection that his delegation wished to ascertain the extent to which intergovernmental bodies had been involved in the restructuring of the programmes carried out by the Secretariat and whether programmes now corresponded to the Secretariat's new organizational structure. He would also welcome additional information on what was being planned with regard to programme 9. Trade and development. It would be interesting to learn, moreover, how the Secretariat proposed to deal with the mandates which had been submitted after the medium-term plan had been proposed. Those included the results of the ninth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD IX), the outcome of the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), and reviews of the programmes of various parts of the Organization. In conclusion, his delegation viewed with sympathy the procedure suggested the previous week by the representative of Mexico, under which the Committee would discuss each programme in the medium-term plan individually.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

92. The CHAIRMAN recalled that at the end of the Committee's previous meeting, the representative of Mexico had questioned the procedure outlined by the Chairman for consideration of the proposed medium-term plan by cluster of programmes. She had proposed instead that the exercise should be carried out programme by programme, in exactly the same way as it had been done in CPC. The Chairman continued to believe, however, that the arrangement he proposed would save time and would allow the Committee to concentrate its efforts on negotiations on the proposed plan during informal consultations.

93. Mr. KELLY (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the European Union supported the Chairman's proposal to consider the programmes in clusters, an approach that would save time and allow the Committee to make more efficient use of the conference services available to it. That approach, however, would not preclude a discussion of the individual programmes in the plan.

94. Ms. BUERGO RODRIGUEZ (Cuba) said that, since the General Assembly was the highest intergovernmental body in the United Nations, it should discuss the medium-term plan programme by programme, just as CPC had done. While it was important to save time, the medium-term plan, which dealt with the activities to be carried out over the next four years, was one of the most important issues to be discussed during the fifty-first session. She shared some of the concerns raised by the Ugandan delegation and believed that the reviews related to the programmes for UNCTAD and Habitat should be submitted to the Fifth Committee for its consideration.

95. Mr. HANSON (Canada) said that he fully supported the Chairman's suggestion that the programmes of the proposed medium-term plan should be considered in clusters. CPC had already considered the programmes individually, and the fruits of those discussions were reflected in its report. It would be useful, therefore, both conceptually and in terms of the efficient use of time, to take the approach suggested by the Chairman in order to avoid repeating the debate which had already taken place in CPC.

96. Mr. REPASCH (United States of America) said that his delegation, too, supported the Chairman's suggestion. The Fifth Committee should not repeat the discussions that had taken place in CPC, but should take advantage of the useful guidance they provided.

97. Ms. PEÑA (Mexico) said that she still wanted to know when the Committee had decided to consider the programmes of the proposed medium-term plan in clusters, and how the clusters would be determined. In the interest of efficiency, it might be desirable to stop reviewing documents during meetings, and even to take decisions by vote, with a view to spending less time in informal consultations, which often led nowhere. Her delegation was willing to explore the possibility of having the programmes presented in clusters, on the understanding that they would no longer be considered in clusters afterwards in the informal consultations. It was important for the Committee to take full advantage of the resources available to it during its general debate on the proposed medium-term plan. In addition, she was interested in hearing the answers to the questions posed by the representative of Uganda concerning programmes 9 and 11.

98. Mr. CARVALHO (Brazil) said that he shared the concerns of Mexico, Cuba and Uganda about how to organize the Committee's deliberations on the item in question. In particular, he wanted to know how the Secretariat intended to cluster the programmes, since the experience of other United Nations bodies had demonstrated the dangers of clustering programmes. He preferred to discuss the programmes in the order in which they had been presented in the proposed medium-term plan. Since the new format for the plan had already reduced the number of programmes by clustering them, his delegation was disturbed about the idea of clustering them further for consideration in the Fifth Committee.

99. Mr. ETUKET (Uganda) said that it would be more prudent to proceed along the lines suggested by the Mexican delegation. If the programmes were considered in clusters, the discussions might tend to move back and forth from one programme to another, with the result that the Committee could fail to focus on specific aspects of some of the programmes. Although he had a high regard for the work of CPC, it was important to remember that that Committee was a subsidiary body of the General Assembly, with limited membership, and that its work did not obviate the need for the Fifth Committee to give the proposed medium-term plan the in-depth consideration it deserved.

100. Mr. KELLY (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that, in order to address one of the points raised by the Mexican delegation, it would be useful for the Chairman to confirm that the cluster approach would serve to structure only the general discussion of the programmes, and would not apply to informal consultations on the subject.

101. The CHAIRMAN said that the Secretariat had taken note of all of the concerns expressed. To enable delegations to take an informed decision, it might be best to revisit the issue after more information had been provided on the programmes and the proposed clusters.

102. He then recalled that the United States delegation had proposed that the Committee should postpone its consideration of the question of the employment of retirees. However, in its decision 50/485 of 7 June 1996, which had been adopted on the report of the Fifth Committee, the General Assembly had decided to extend the provisions of paragraph 6 of its resolution 49/222 B relating to the employment of retirees by Conference Services until 30 October 1996 and that no further extension of that derogation would be granted beyond that date. In part (d) of the same decision, the General Assembly had decided to consider as a matter of priority and no later than 15 October 1996 the relevant report of the Secretary-General, and had requested the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to have its related report available by 1 October 1996. Considering the time constraints that resulted from that decision, he wondered whether the Committee would agree to postpone informal consultations on the issue until later in the week.

103. Ms. PEÑA (Mexico) said that the 15 October deadline had been decided upon by consensus, and she wondered what implications the proposed delay would have for conference services. In particular, the contracts of the interpreters hired temporarily for the Assembly session would expire at the end of October 1996, and she asked for clarification of what problems would ensue if the Committee failed to decide on the matter before that time.

104. Ms. BUERGO RODRIGUEZ (Cuba) said that she shared the concerns expressed by the representative of Mexico.

105. Mr. MAÏGA (Mali) said that, since the report on the employment of retirees was not very lengthy, he saw no reason to postpone the discussions.

106. Mrs. GRAHAM (United States of America) pointed out that the purpose of formal meetings was to enable delegations to state their positions, while that of informal consultations was to seek consensus. If informal consultations were

held too early, delegations would have to state their positions first in that context, and then again, for the record, in the formal meetings. Although she recognized that a deadline had been established, only five delegations had stated their positions on the issue thus far, whereas 17 would have done so by the end of the week. The informal consultations would progress faster if the participants did not have to go over the same ground twice. However, her delegation was willing to show flexibility.

107. Mr. HALLIDAY (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) confirmed that the contracts of some staff hired to service the fifty-first session would expire at the end of October and that, under the current arrangements, the Organization could not extend those contracts, but would have to hire new staff at that point. Since that alternative was not efficient or cost-effective, the Secretariat urgently needed the advice of the Fifth Committee before the established deadline.

108. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to begin informal consultations on the issue the following afternoon.

109. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FIFTY-FIRST SESSION

Official Records

FIFTH COMMITTEE
11th meeting
held on
Tuesday, 22 October 1996
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 11th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. SENGWE (Zimbabwe)

later: Mr. STEIN (Germany)
(Vice-Chairman)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 110: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1996-1997 (continued) (A/50/7/Add.16 and A/51/7/Add.1; A/C.5/50/57 and Add.1)

1. Mr. KIM Bong Hyun (Republic of Korea) said that the Secretary-General had indicated in his report (A/C.5/50/57/Add.1) that he was achieving savings in the programme budget without affecting the full implementation of mandated programmes and activities by maintaining a rate of personnel vacancies which was higher than the rate approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/214. Moreover, the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/51/7/Add.1) noted that the costs of new mandates for 1996-1997 were also being absorbed through the vacancy rate. However, the United Nations depended on its human resources to ensure efficient operations, and he shared the concern expressed by the Group of 77 and China about the potentially negative impact of the higher vacancy rate on the implementation of programmes and activities and on staff morale. In particular, he was concerned about the Secretary-General's reference to the possible involuntary separation of staff, since the General Assembly had not yet decided to abolish posts and had not yet considered the Secretary-General's proposals on budget reduction. He shared the Advisory Committee's view that the Secretary-General should not carry out any involuntary separations solely to achieve budgetary savings.

2. With respect to efficiency gains, he agreed with the Advisory Committee that efficiency reviews should be geared more to the efficient long-term operation of the Organization's activities than to the short-term goal of cost-cutting. He was concerned about how much attention the Secretary-General paid to the request, contained in part II of General Assembly resolution 50/214, that adequate resources should be allocated in the 1996-1997 programme budget for activities specifically relating to the least developed countries. As the Advisory Committee had noted in paragraph 9 of its report, the Secretary-General had not made clear how the numerous deferrals, delays, postponements and cancellations in the approved programmes would affect the Organization's ability to carry out the mandates entrusted to it by the competent intergovernmental organs. Any information on how the Secretary-General intended to implement deferred or postponed activities should be made available. Lastly, he concurred with the recommendations, contained in paragraph 38 of the Advisory Committee's report, on the updating of the estimates in the Secretary-General's report and the approval by the General Assembly of revised appropriations for the biennium.

3. Mr. OUANE (Mali) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made in the Fifth Committee by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77. In the context of the current efforts to achieve budgetary savings, the basic question was whether the steps being taken and the proposed solutions respected the parameters set by General Assembly resolution 50/214. In that regard, the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/50/57/Add.1) proposed a budget reduction of $154 million, as requested in the resolution; a personnel vacancy rate higher than the 6.4 per cent approved by the General Assembly; and the absorption of the financial implications of new mandates through the cost-saving measures envisaged in resolution 50/214.

4. The proposed methodology for achieving budgetary savings raised many concerns. He wondered to what extent intergovernmental bodies had been involved in the process of changing and reviewing programmes and activities arising from legislative mandates. He shared the Advisory Committee's view that, in case of doubt, the Secretariat should seek guidance from Member States, since changes in such programmes and activities were the prerogative of the General Assembly.

5. Another important point was the proposed vacancy rate, which exceeded the rate of 6.4 per cent set by the General Assembly for staff in the Professional category and above. In taking that decision, the Secretariat had acted on its own initiative. It was important to determine the impact of that high vacancy rate on the implementation of programmes arising from intergovernmental mandates. He wondered about the wisdom of using outside consultants and short-term contracts at a time when the Organization was streamlining its administrative structure.

6. Efforts to finance new activities mandated by intergovernmental bodies in the context of the proposed cost-saving measures should not lose sight of current budgetary procedures. In that regard, it was important to observe the principles laid down in General Assembly resolution 41/213. Programmes and activities relating to developing countries, and particularly least developed countries, were among the Organization's major concerns, yet drastic reductions were being proposed in that area. For example, the Secretary-General had projected nearly $7.7 million in savings under section 10A of the programme budget (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)), without explaining how that reduction had been arrived at or its potential impact on the programme of work of UNCTAD. Likewise, cuts were being planned in programmes under sections 4 and 7A, as noted in paragraph 13 of the Advisory Committee's report. However, the proposed changes conflicted with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/214, in which the Secretary-General had been requested to ensure that adequate resources were allocated in the 1996-1997 programme budget for activities specifically relating to the least developed countries. Although cost-saving and efficiency measures were necessary and beneficial in many areas, they should not hinder programme delivery.

AGENDA ITEM 120: HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (continued) (A/51/304, A/51/421 and A/51/475; A/C.5/49/63, A/C.5/49/64, A/C.5/50/64, A/C.5/51/1, A/C.5/51/2, A/C.5/51/3, A/C.5/51/6 and A/C.5/51/7)

7. Mr. KAUSIKAN (Singapore) said that he wished to interpret, in the light of the issue of human resources management, the statements made at the preceding meeting by the Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management concerning an expert group meeting on violence against women migrant workers. In a statement made in the Fifth Committee on 16 October 1996, his delegation had raised some specific concerns regarding that meeting; the Secretariat's response to those concerns illustrated a fundamental human resources management problem. First, it had claimed that what had occurred at the expert group meeting was the normal United Nations practice that had been followed at 26 other such meetings. However, misconduct was not justified by repetition, and the willingness to accept past practice on that ground alone was

not a characteristic of a dynamic and forward-looking staff. As the President of the General Assembly had stated at the current session, the Secretariat could no longer operate on a 'business as usual' basis.

8. The Secretariat had failed to address two of Singapore's concerns, and had claimed that another problem it had noted was attributable to a technical error. However, technical errors could not explain the pattern of systemic bias which had been evident in that episode. At the preceding meeting, the Under-Secretary-General had referred to Singapore's attack on the integrity and impartiality of the international civil service; however, Singapore had merely expressed some very precise concerns about a specific Division and a specific staff member.

9. The crux of his delegation's approach to the whole matter was its belief in the principle of individual responsibility and accountability. Only when Member States insisted that that principle should be taken as the basic approach to human resources management would the Secretariat be able to truly reform itself. Singapore disagreed with the Assistant Secretary-General's contention that the question of a salary increase was not relevant to the conduct of a staff member, since individual reward for individual performance was the logical corollary of a corporate culture of individual responsibility and accountability. Those were not radical concepts, but only the normal principles by which most organizations operated. The United Nations must adopt that practice in its system of remuneration if it was to improve its functioning.

10. Mr. ARMITAGE (Australia), speaking on behalf of Australia, Canada and New Zealand, said that, pending the reform of the internal system of justice of the United Nations, the current system must be respected and its procedures must be scrupulously followed to ensure that those who were subject to it received the benefits of due process. In that regard, he welcomed the statements made the previous day by the Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management.

11. The Secretary-General's strategy for the management of human resources was crucial in view of the efforts being made to reduce personnel costs without affecting programme delivery. The General Assembly could play an important role in determining the directions of the strategy and considering the main management tools for its implementation. The report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/51/1) referred to the impact of the current budgetary circumstances and of the savings exercise on the strategy's implementation. However, if the Secretariat had made greater progress in implementing the strategy, it would have been better able to deal with the human resources implications of the savings exercise.

12. Too many sections of the report referred to activities which had not yet been implemented and to proposals which had not yet been adopted. In any event, he was encouraged by the progress of the Performance Appraisal System, which would undoubtedly prove its value as a basic management tool once the first full performance cycle had been completed. An effective performance appraisal system should facilitate staff development, foster the primacy of the merit principle and provide useful insight into the state of management in the Organization.

The People Management Training Programme was also significant in view of the importance of human resources management for the Organization's future viability, and the senior management symposium had helped to ensure the full commitment of senior management to the strategy. He hoped that the recruitment initiatives outlined in the report would help to give effect to the principles set forth in Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter, and to further strengthen the role of the merit principle in recruitment, placement and promotion. Australia, Canada and New Zealand would continue to work actively on those issues, particularly with regard to improving the status of women.

13. The proposals for improving staff mobility were promising, but he wished that they had actually been implemented. Managed reassignment was a practical way to help increase the Organization's responsiveness and flexibility. With regard to the decentralization of personnel functions and the delegation of authority, much of the Organization's current human resources management revolved around administrative processing instead of strategic planning and policy advice. To enable the Office of Human Resources Management to focus on the latter functions, the efficiency reviews should rationalize administrative processing and much of that work should then be delegated to the departments or executive offices directly concerned.

14. Mr. Stein (Germany), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

15. Mrs. BASHIR (Sudan) said that much remained to be done to implement the Secretary-General's human resources management strategy, which was intended to improve the Organization's performance, to ensure the competence and efficiency of its staff and to provide a favourable climate for the structural reforms that were needed to enhance the important role of the Organization as set forth in the Charter.

16. Her delegation considered that there were certain areas of employment such as budget and finance, procurement, support services management and conference services, in which local appointments could be made, particularly away from Headquarters. Such a step would reduce costs and create skills at the national level. Her delegation considered that the staff training services of the United Nations could play an effective part in providing training for local staff in such fields, as well as in peacemaking and the management of complex emergency situations.

17. Making appointments on a competitive basis was an effective way of ensuring fairness in recruitment and of selecting highly qualified officials. The strategy for the appointment of young university graduates was an important means of encouraging the younger generation in the developing countries to become interested in working for the Organization and gaining the necessary experience so that they became the nucleu of the administration in the future.

18. With respect to the advancement of women in the Secretariat, her delegation was aware that social customs and the lack of educational opportunities for women in some developing countries were obstacles to the attainment of that objective but felt that greater efforts should be made in the Secretariat to increase the percentage of women at the policy-making and decision-making level.

19. Her delegation hoped that cost reduction efforts would not have an adverse effect on working conditions as that might hamper the ability of the Organization to attract highly qualified staff and might make it an uncompetitive employer as compared with other organizations.

20. Document A/C.5/51/3 on respect for the privileges and immunities of officials of the United Nations system referred, in paragraphs 55 to 58, to violations of privileges and immunities by the rebel forces in the south of the Sudan. As a Party to the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, her country condemned such criminal activities which hindered the United Nations in its activities. It affirmed its commitment to the respect for the privileges and immunities of international personnel in its territory and hoped to be able to cooperate with the United Nations in avoiding any repetition of such acts in the future.

21. Mr. HAJAYANDI (Burundi) said that his Government deeply regretted and condemned the killings of Red Cross workers and attacks on World Food Programme officials in Burundi by armed bands, and had opened judicial inquiries into those events. The unprecedented socio-political crisis afflicting Burundi had enabled criminals to commit vicious crimes against both the local population and foreigners present in the country under assistance programmes. It was the Government's intention to promote a lasting peace through negotiations between all political factions aimed at achieving national reconciliation.

22. He welcomed the close collaboration which had been established between the police in Burundi and United Nations agencies. He called on all mission personnel in Burundi scrupulously to respect security directives in view of the situation in the country. The Government would continue to do its utmost to ensure the security of all foreigners in general, and of international officials in particular.

23. Mr. GODA (Japan) said that his delegation agreed with the Secretary-General that people were the greatest asset of the United Nations. In order to utilize that asset fully, however, the Organization must establish a long-term career development plan as soon as possible. One of the Organization's most serious management shortcomings was that it had failed to develop such an approach. He was therefore disappointed that the Secretariat continued to focus exclusively on how to assist staff in formulating career plans, since responsibility for career development also lay with the Organization, which should consider how to use individual staff members over an extended period. Such a plan was indispensable if human resources were to be managed in an intelligent manner.

24. While the goal of the human resources management strategy was a good one, its components needed review. With regard to planning, career and performance management capacity, all personnel action began with planning, for which purpose an information system was needed. In that connection he asked for clarification of the status of the Integrated Management Information System, since it was supposed to contribute to creating such a capacity. Further, he wished to know how the planning unit established within the Office of Human Resources Management was functioning.

25. His delegation strongly supported national competitive examinations as a tool for recruiting qualified personnel and correcting inequities in geographical distribution. The Secretariat should shorten the time taken to offer posts to successful candidates. He asked for clarification of the legislative basis of the statement in the report on the composition of the Secretariat that seven women candidates had been recruited outside the context of national competitive examinations (A/51/421, para. 38), and asked how many male candidates had been so recruited. The Staff Rules provided that appointment to such posts, as well as to language posts, should be made exclusively through competitive examinations.

26. His delegation welcomed the proposal to introduce a development programme for junior Professionals. If implemented, however, the proposal would give authority over personnel management of core staff to the Office of Human Resources Management, which would require an adjustment in the proposal regarding delegation of authority. In that connection staff whose performance so merited should continue to be considered for promotion to the P-3 level after two years.

27. He took note with interest of pro-active recruitment activities and enhancement of cooperation with Member States. Japan would continue to cooperate fully in recruitment activities, which should duly reflect equitable geographical distribution.

28. On the management culture/management skills development component of the strategy, he welcomed the improved management training programmes. With regard to the staff college project, he supported programmes focused on system-wide goals, but had serious reservations about the existing project because the involvement of institutions such as the United Nations Institute for Training and Research had been requested without authorization by the General Assembly and because Member States did not have a clear picture of the scheme in its entirety. Detailed information should be provided, and, if the Secretariat was considering a plan requiring a change in a legislative mandate, it should submit its proposals to the legislative body concerned.

29. With regard to work planning and performance appraisal management, the new Performance Appraisal System (PAS) was a key tool. It was a pity that introduction of the system had been delayed because of the financial situation. The Secretariat should fully implement the system worldwide and report thereon at the fifty-third session. With respect to the decentralization and delegation of authority component, personnel administration should be streamlined in order to eliminate redundancies and enhance efficiency. Nevertheless, before authority could be decentralized or delegated, a system of accountability and responsibility must be established, failing which delegation would result in a chaotic system where no one had responsibility.

30. Turning to enhanced attrition/early retirement, he asked how the early separation programme proposed by the Secretariat had contributed to human resources management beyond the budgetary savings it had produced.

31. As to additional human resources management issues, he supported the proposed reform of the internal system of justice. His delegation noted the

improvement in the representation of women. That initiative should continue on the basis of the basic principles of the Charter and due consideration for under-represented and unrepresented countries.

32. His delegation appreciated efforts to improve the representation of Member States, but noted that Japan remained seriously under-represented. The Secretariat should enhance its efforts to recruit personnel from unrepresented and under-represented countries.

33. The safety and security of the staff were of great importance. The adoption of the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel had been an important first step. Japan had ratified the Convention and urged other Member States to do so.

34. The Secretary-General's report on retirees provided only general comments and lacked any analysis of the extended use of retirees. While such a practice might be cost-effective in the short term, it might be counter-productive in the long term. His delegation also had reservations regarding the Advisory Committee's recommendation for a $22,000 per annum cap.

35. The importance of human resources management could not be overemphasized. Member States shared with the Secretariat the goal of improving management so as to enhance the operation of the Organization.

36. Ms. CHAMBERS (United States of America) said that her delegation remained committed to strengthening the Secretary-General's authority as the chief administrative officer of the Organization. She looked forward to full implementation of his strategy to improve the management of personnel resources. To that end there would need to be a change in the management culture so as to move into the twenty-first century with a well-managed and efficient personnel system.

37. Her delegation supported introduction of the Performance Appraisal System (PAS) and the People Management Training Programme. The result should be increased responsibility and accountability of staff. Her delegation also supported the promotion of staff training and development opportunities, for the benefit of both staff and the Organization. The necessary time and resources must be committed.

38. The advancement of women was of great importance. While the Organization had reached its 1995 goal of a 35 per cent participation rate for women in geographical positions in mid-1996, it was nowhere near its 1995 goal of 25 per cent participation by women in posts at the D-1 level and above. Even though the hiring freeze and the vacancy rate limited the Organization's ability to increase the numbers of posts filled by women, that effort must continue.

39. She welcomed the creation of the staff-management task force to deal with harassment, including sexual harassment, at all duty stations. A programme to eliminate harassment must be vigorously pursued.

40. At the fiftieth session the Fifth Committee had requested the Secretary-General to develop a policy on retirees that would not violate the "double

dipping" principle and would allow the Secretariat to staff its activities adequately. No retiree should receive more in salary and pension benefits in any calendar year from the United Nations than he or she had earned prior to retirement. She appreciated the point that in the area of conference services the skills possessed by retirees were in critical demand at peak times. Nonetheless those skills were not unique to retirees. A six-month ceiling was too long, and there was no need to exempt conference services personnel from the salary cap. Such temporary employment situations were ideal opportunities for outsourcing. The rehiring of retirees, even if on an exceptional and strictly controlled basis, must be kept to a minimum so as to avoid compromising the Office of Human Resources Management's commitment to career development.

41. Her delegation deplored the dangers confronting United Nations staff worldwide and the deaths of 10 staff members over the period covered by the Secretary-General's report on privileges and immunities (A/C.5/51/3). With respect to the reference in that report (para. 9) to restrictions imposed by the United States authorities on the private travel of staff members, her Government was committed to its treaty obligations as host country, and would not restrict in any way any travel of United Nations employees on official business. Nevertheless, the United States reserved the right to restrict private travel within its territory of certain United Nations officials for reasons of national security. The question should, in any event, be properly considered in the Sixth Committee.

42. Her delegation supported the need for adequate time and resources for staff representation, but the number of staff released either full or part-time was out of proportion and needed to be reduced. The report on costs and modalities of staff representational activities (A/C.5/51/6) indicated that total annual indirect costs amounted to some $2.4 million, a much higher figure than in previous years. Those costs, and how indirect costs were determined, needed to be explained.

43. The Secretary-General must be allowed to exercise his authority and leadership within the framework established by the General Assembly regarding the limits of the budget and performance of mandates. Member States would become bogged down in micromanagement if they could not support the Secretary-General as chief administrative officer. Inevitably he would make decisions that would not please all concerned, but as long as they were consistent with the principles of the United Nations, he must be willing and able to make them.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.